Amendments to the Claims:

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (previously presented):   1. An autonomous response method, comprising: autonomously updating a statement-response database; and

autonomously generating a natural language response to a received natural language input, wherein said generating a response comprises following a conversation strategy, choosing at least one context element from a context database and searching said updated statement-response database using said at least one context element to select a response.

Claim 2 (original): The method of claim 1 in which said autonomously updating comprises:

autonomously downloading publication content that matches at least one search criteria from an online publication formatted to be in human readable form;

converting said downloaded publication content into at least one entry suitable for use in said statement-response database; and,

storing said at least one entry in said statement-response database.

Claim 3 (original): The method of claim 1 in which said autonomously updating comprises:

autonomously acquiring an information stream from an audio-visual program presented in human accessible form, wherein said program matches at least one program search criteria;

transforming said information stream into at least one entry suitable for use in said statement-response database; and,

storing said at least one entry in said statement-response database.

Claim 4 (original): The method of claim 1, in which said statement-response database includes at least one ranked-list of response entries appropriate to a statement.

Claim 5 (original): The method of claim 1, in which said statement-response database includes at least one ranked-list of response entries related to prior conversations with a specific user.

Claim 6 (previously presented): The method of claim 1, in which said autonomously generating a response to a natural language query further comprises: receiving said query as an electronic character stream; parsing said query into a statement; generating a plurality of candidate responses appropriate to said statement by searching said statement-response database; choosing a best response from said candidate responses using said conversation strategy and said at least one context element taken from said context database; outputting said best response as an electronic character stream.

Claim 7 (previously presented): The method of claim 1, in which said autonomously generating a response to a natural language query further comprises: receiving an input audio signal corresponding to a human voice representation of said query; converting said input audio signal into a query represented by an electronic character stream; parsing said query into a statement; generating a plurality of candidate responses appropriate to said statement by searching said statement-response database; choosing a best response from said candidate responses using said conversation strategy and said at least one context element taken from said context database; generating an electronic character stream representing a natural language version of said best response; and, converting said electronic character stream into a synthetic speech signal corresponding to an audible version of said best response.

Claim 8 (original): The method of claim 1, in which said context database includes a context element chosen from the group consisting of a date, a time, a temperature, a weather condition, a stock market index, an event result, a poll, an opinion survey, a transpired time of current conversation, a transpired number of responses and an identity of a current enquirer.

Claim 9 (original): The method of claim 1, in which said conversation strategy comprises: negotiating an identity of a current enquirer; negotiating a meaning of a current query; and, negotiating a conclusion to a current conversation.

Claim 10 (original): The method of claim 1, in which said conversation strategy comprises: scoring said query by assessing the level of language use in said query input to provide a

metric of query sophistication; generating at least two candidate responses appropriate to said query; scoring said at least two candidate responses by assessing the level of language use in said candidate responses to provide a metric of response sophistication for each candidate response; choosing said candidate response having said metric of repose sophistication that most closely matches said metric of query sophistication.

Claim 11 (previously presented): An autonomous response apparatus, comprising: a processor capable of:

autonomously updating a statement-response database; and

autonomously generating a natural language response to a received natural language input, wherein said generating a response comprises following a conversation strategy, choosing at least one context element from a context database and searching said updated statement-response database using said one context element to select a response.

Claim 12 (original): The apparatus of claim 11 in which said in which said processor is further capable of: autonomously downloading publication content that matches at least one search criteria from an online publication formatted to be in human readable form; converting said downloaded publication content into at least one entry suitable for use in said statement-response database; and, storing said at least one entry in said statement-response database.

Claim 13 (original): The apparatus of claim 11 in which said processor is further capable of autonomously updating, comprising: autonomously acquiring an information stream from an audio-visual program presented in human accessible form, wherein said program matches at least one program search criteria; transforming said information stream into at least one entry suitable for use in said statement-response database; and, storing said at least one entry in said statement-response database.

Claim 14 (original): The apparatus of claim 11, in which said statement-response database includes at least one ranked-list of response entries appropriate to a statement.

Claim 15 (canceled)

4

Claim 16 (original): The apparatus of claim 11, in which said processor is further capable of generating a response to a natural language query comprising: receiving said query as an electronic character stream; parsing said query into a statement; generating a plurality of candidate responses appropriate to said statement by searching said statement-response database; choosing a best response from said candidate responses using said conversation strategy and said at least one context element taken from said context database; outputting said best response as an electronic character stream.

Claim 17 (original): The apparatus of claim 11, in which said processor is capable of generating a response to a natural language query further comprising: receiving an input audio signal corresponding to a human voice representation of said query; converting said input audio signal into a query represented by an electronic character stream; parsing said query into a statement; generating a plurality of candidate responses appropriate to said statement by searching said statement-response database; choosing a best response from said candidate responses using said conversation strategy and said at least one context element taken from said context database; generating an electronic character stream representing a natural language version of said best response; and, converting said electronic character stream into a synthetic speech signal corresponding to an audible version of said best response.

Claim 18 (original): The apparatus of claim 11, in which said context database includes a context element chosen from the group consisting of a date, a time, a temperature, a weather condition, a stock market index, an event result, a poll, an opinion survey, a transpired time of current conversation, a transpired number of responses and an identity of a current enquirer.

Claim 19 (original): The apparatus of claim 11, in which said processor is further capable of a conversation strategy comprising: negotiating an identity of a current enquirer; negotiating a meaning of a current query; and, negotiating a conclusion to a current conversation.

Claim 20 (original): The apparatus of claim 11, in which said processor is further capable of a conversation strategy comprising: scoring said query by assessing the level of language use

in said query input to provide a metric of query sophistication; generating at least two candidate responses appropriate to said query; scoring said at least two candidate responses by assessing the level of language use in said candidate responses to provide a metric of response sophistication for each candidate response; choosing said candidate response having said metric of repose sophistication that most closely matches said metric of query sophistication.

Claim 21 (new): An autonomous response method, comprising:

autonomously updating a context database, said context database containing one or more context elements each related to an external real world element;

autonomously updating a statement-response database, said updating including selecting at least one of said context elements and using said selected context element to form an optimism index and associating a possible response with said optimism index; and

autonomously generating a natural language response to a received natural language input, wherein said generating a response comprises choosing at least one context element from said context database and searching said updated statement-response database to obtain a list of possible responses ranked by said optimism indicia, and using said at least one context element as part of a current optimism index to select a response from said ranked list of possible responses.